



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

May 26, 2005

The Honorable Gale A. Norton
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Room 7214
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Madam Secretary:

Thank you for meeting with me recently about oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico off Florida's coast. I appreciated hearing your views. But as I stated, drilling where there are relatively few energy resources poses too grave a risk to Florida's \$50-billion tourism industry, while also encroaching on Air Force and Navy training operations in the area.

Such drilling also poses a number of environmental-and marine-habitat threats from drilling muds and other fluids discharged during the extraction process - fluids that contain toxic chemicals such as vanadium and arsenic.

Based on your comments, though, it's clear the administration is aiming to open up nearly 4-million acres in so-called Lease Sale 181 at least to new gas leasing as early as 2007. Clearly, I can't stand by and allow the big oil and gas companies to move closer to Florida's beaches.

Therefore, I will maintain my hold on Lynn Scarlett, the nominee to be your deputy secretary. Though she seems well qualified in most respects, she too has refused to provide a commitment to protecting Florida from the ravages of drilling activities.

In so doing, I stand firm with Gov. Jeb Bush, members of our congressional delegation and millions of Florida residents whose standard of living depends on a clean environment and strong state economy. I urge you to consult with the governor, who also has pushed for protecting the parts of Lease Sale 181 that fall under Florida's boundaries.

Finally, I hope you will do what's in the country's best interest, which I believe means developing a comprehensive energy strategy - not based on a misguided philosophy that we can drill our way out of dependence on foreign oil, but one based on getting tougher with the oil cartel, developing alternative energy sources and more efficiently using what we have.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson